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Rethinking the Divide between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī: The Possibility and Nature of the Afterlife *

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Abstract: This article reconsiders the familiar opposition between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī on the afterlife by distinguishing the question of possibility from the question of nature. It argues that the fundamental divide in Islamic eschatological thought is not initially between Avicenna's bodiless immortality and al-Ghazālī's bodily resurrection, but between theistic materialist and dualist accounts of the self. Materialist models that appeal to reassembly or re-creation fail to secure numerical identity after bodily death. By contrast, dualism grounds post-mortem survival in the persistence of the immaterial soul, a framework shared by Avicenna and, with qualifications, al-Ghazālī. Their real disagreement concerns the mode of post-mortem existence: whether the surviving soul remains bodiless or is rejoined to a body. The article argues that neither side decisively refutes the other. Consequently, Avicenna and al-Ghazālī should be seen as dualist allies on possibility and intra-dualist rivals on nature. This redrawing clarifies the philosophical structure and significance of Islamic eschatological debates.

Keywords: Avicenna, al-Ghazālī, Islamic eschatology, theistic materialism, soul-body dualism.

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Introduction

The question of life after death occupies a central place in Islamic philosophy and *kalām* theology. This issue is not merely a doctrinal question concerning how scriptural descriptions of reward and punishment should be interpreted; it is also a philosophical problem concerning whether the self can continue to exist after bodily death. Any theory of post-mortem existence must answer at least two distinct questions. First, is life after death possible? Second, if it is possible, what is the nature of this post-mortem existence? These two questions are closely related, but they are not identical. The first concerns the metaphysical conditions under which the same self can survive death; the second the mode or form in which such existence takes place.

In the history of Islamic thought, debates over the afterlife have often been framed, especially through the *tahāfut* tradition, around the opposition between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī. Avicenna is commonly associated with a spiritual or bodiless account of post-mortem existence, whereas al-Ghazālī is associated with the defense of bodily resurrection. This contrast is not groundless, since they do disagree about the nature or mode of post-mortem life. Yet when it is treated as the central axis of the debate, it may obscure two important points. First, it leaves aside earlier *kalām* accounts that ground human identity in the body or in bodily constituents, thereby making the divide between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī divide appear more fundamental than it is. Second, it suggests that their positions are opposed in every respect and cannot be reconciled at any level.

This article argues that the divide between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, though significant, should not be regarded as the most fundamental division in Islamic discussions of life after death. Rather, the more basic divide lies between materialist and dualist accounts of the self within a theistic framework. This claim depends on two distinctions that are often not made sufficiently clear. The first is the distinction between the possibility and the nature of the afterlife. The second is the distinction between bodily or materially grounded accounts of the self and dualist accounts that identify the self with an immaterial soul. Once these distinctions are made, the basic map of the debate

changes. Philosophically speaking, the fundamental divide, at least at the first stage, is not between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, but between theistic materialist[1] accounts of personal identity and dualist accounts of the self.

The central claim of this article is therefore twofold. First, with regard to the possibility of the afterlife, Avicenna and al-Ghazālī are not fundamental opponents, but members of the same dualist camp. Neither makes post-mortem survival depend on bodily continuity; both explain it through the persistence of the immaterial soul. Their real disagreement emerges only at the next stage, namely over the nature of the afterlife. Avicenna defends bodiless immortality, whereas al-Ghazālī defends the re-embodiment of the soul in the afterlife. This disagreement is significant; however, it is not a fundamental opposition between two rival metaphysical frameworks, but rather an intra-dualist disagreement.

In line with this two-level structure, the argument proceeds in two steps. First, I argue that the possibility of the afterlife is best understood as a dispute between theistic materialism and dualism: materialist accounts struggle to secure the persistence of the same person after bodily death, whereas dualism grounds survival in the immaterial soul. Second, I examine the intra-dualist dispute between Avicenna's bodiless immortality and al-Ghazālī's account of re-embodiment. I argue that although their shared dualism has a philosophical advantage over theistic materialism, neither Avicenna's nor al-Ghazālī's account establishes decisive superiority within the dualist framework. The central conclusion is therefore that Avicenna and al-Ghazālī are not fundamental opponents concerning the possibility of the afterlife. They are dualist allies on the question of possibility, but intra-dualist rivals on the question of nature.

1. The Possibility of the Afterlife: Dualists versus Theistic Materialists

Having distinguished the question of the possibility of the afterlife

[1] By "theistic materialism," I do not mean a general materialism that denies God, revelation, or the unseen. I use the term in a restricted sense to refer to a bodily or material account of the self within a theistic worldview.

from the question of its nature, we can now turn to the first and more fundamental level of the debate. At this level, the central issue is not whether post-mortem existence is bodiless or re-embodied, but whether the same self can survive bodily death at all. I shall argue that this question brings into view a more basic divide than the familiar opposition between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī: the divide between theistic materialist accounts of the self and dualist accounts of the self. If the self is identical with the body or with some bodily constituent, then bodily death appears to generate serious difficulties for the rational possibility of the afterlife. If, however, the self is an immaterial substance, then bodily death does not by itself entail the destruction of the self. The aim of this section is to show that theistic materialist accounts face significant philosophical difficulties in securing post-mortem survival, whereas the dualist account shared by Avicenna and, with certain qualifications, al-Ghazālī provides a more coherent basis for the possibility of the afterlife.

1.1. The Predicament of Theistic Materialism: Is the Life after Death Possible?

Theistic materialism is not an artificial category imposed from outside the Islamic tradition, but corresponds to a family of views widely represented among earlier *mutakallimūn*. In his summary of earlier theological positions, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī reports that many theologians identified the human being with a body or with some bodily constituent. Some took the "I" to refer to the sensible bodily structure; others located human identity in enduring essential parts, an indivisible particle, subtle bodies diffused through the organs, a bodily spirit, the brain, the four humors or blood, temperament, bodily form and arrangement, or life itself. These views differ considerably in detail, but they share a common commitment: the human person is explained in bodily or materially grounded terms rather than as an immaterial substance.[2]

[2] Fahreddîn Râzi, *el-Muhassal: Ana Meseleleriyle Kelâm ve Felsefe*, trans. Eşref Altaş (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2020), 203–204. For contemporary analogues, especially in debates over Christian materialism or physicalism, see Peter van Inwagen, "The Possibility of Resurrection," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 9/2

Once theistic materialism is understood as a bodily or materially grounded account of the self, its theory of resurrection can be divided into two main models. According to the first model, bodily death does not annihilate the body's constituent parts. These parts persist after the dissolution of the living body, and God later reassembles them into the bodily form of the person. According to the second model, the body and its constituent parts cease to exist at death; at the resurrection, God re-creates the very same body and thereby brings the same person back into existence.[3] The former may be called the reassembly model, whereas the latter may be called the re-creation model. These two models will be examined in turn, since each attempts to explain how the same person can exist after death while relying on a materially grounded account of personal identity.

The reassembly model initially appears to be the less problematic version of the materialist account. Unlike the re-creation model, it does not require the same body to return after having entirely ceased to exist. Rather, it assumes that the body's fundamental parts survive the dissolution of the living organism and that God, who knows where these dispersed particles are and has the power to gather them, can reassemble them into the bodily form of the person.[4]

The difficulty, however, does not concern divine power as such. One may grant that God can know, locate, and reassemble dispersed bodily particles. The problem is whether such reassembly can preserve the numerical identity of the person. Human bodies exchange their material parts throughout life. The particles that constitute a person's body in infancy, adulthood, and at the moment of death are not all the same. If God can reassemble the particles belonging to one temporal stage of the body, then, in principle, He can also reassemble

(1978): 114–121; Dean W. Zimmerman, "The Compatibility of Materialism and Survival," *Faith and Philosophy* 16/2 (1999): 194–212; Kevin J. Corcoran, *Rethinking Human Nature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006); and Aykut Alper Yılmaz, *İnsan Nedir? Teistik Materyalizmin İmkânı* (Istanbul: Albaraka Yayınları, 2022).

3 For the distinction between the re-creation of the same body and the reassembly of its surviving parts, see, Râzî, *el-Muhassal*, 203.

4 For the general philosophical discussion of bodily resurrection and the appeal to divine omnipotence in securing post-mortem life, see Brian Davies, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 224–225.

those belonging to another temporal stage. But in that case, several reassembled bodies could equally claim material continuity with the same earthly person. The result would be a plurality of candidates for being numerically identical with one and the same person.

Appealing to divine wisdom does not remove the difficulty. The problem is not whether God would in fact choose to reassemble only one set of particles, but whether the model can explain why one set of particles, rather than another, is identity-conferring. Suppose that the particles belonging to childhood, maturity, and the moment of death are each sufficient, when reassembled, to constitute the same person. Then, in principle, God could reassemble all of them simultaneously. But this would imply that several distinct reassembled bodies are numerically identical with one and the same person at the same time. Such a result is not merely strange; it is logically impossible. Numerical identity is one-one: if A is identical with B and C is also identical with B, then A and C must be identical with each other. Yet the reassembly model would generate distinct bodies occupying different locations while each is claimed to be identical with the same earthly person. To say that God, in His wisdom, would actualize only one of these candidates does not solve the logical problem. It merely avoids actualizing the contradiction. The model still lacks a principled criterion for explaining which set of particles would be sufficient for the survival of the person. Unless such a criterion is supplied, the reassembly model leaves open the possibility of multiple simultaneous candidates for personal identity; and precisely this possibility shows that material reassembly by itself cannot secure numerical identity.[5]

If the materialist is to defend the possibility of the life after death, a different strategy is required. This brings us to the second model: the re-creation of the same body after its complete annihilation: the body

[5] Peter van Inwagen's materialist account appeals to a preservation strategy: God may preserve, or remove for safekeeping, the corpse or at least the "core person" at death and later restore it to life, thereby avoiding the problem of complete discontinuity. See Peter van Inwagen, "Dualism and Materialism: Athens and Jerusalem?," *Faith and Philosophy* 12, no. 4 (1995), 486. For objections to this kind of preservation strategy, see Yılmaz, *İnsan Nedir?*, 292-295.

does not survive death even as a dispersed aggregate of particles; rather, it ceases to exist altogether and is later re-created by God. According to defenders of this model, since the person is identical not with an immaterial soul but with the body, the destruction of the body entails the destruction of the person. At the resurrection, however, God re-creates the very same body, and thereby the very same person returns to existence.

Within Islamic theology, this difficulty was reformulated as the problem of *iʿādat al-maʿdūm*: whether one and the same object can have temporally discontinuous existence, ceasing to exist at one time and returning later as numerically the same thing. Avicenna sharpens the difficulty by arguing that, for a non-existent individual to return to existence as the very same individual, all the individuating determinations by virtue of which it is that very individual would also have to be re-instantiated; yet among these determinations is the time at which it previously existed. If that earlier time is itself brought back into existence, then the case is no longer one of a later return to existence, since the distinction between the former time and the later time would collapse. If, however, that earlier time is not brought back, then what comes to exist later lacks one of the individuating determinations of the former object and therefore cannot be numerically identical with it. The problem may be put more formally as follows: if an object A_1 begins to exist at t_1 and ceases to exist at t_2, and a later object A_2 begins to exist at t_3, then either A_2 is not identical with A_1, in which case there is only the production of another object, or A_2 is identical with A_1, in which case the same object would have two distinct beginnings of existence. Since numerical identity requires the identity of the very individual in question, and since t_1 and t_3 are distinct beginnings, the later object cannot be numerically identical with the former one. What is re-created after annihilation is therefore, at most, a qualitatively similar object, not the very same object.[6]

[6] For Avicenna's argument against *iʿādat al-maʿdūm*, see Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing: A Parallel English-Arabic Text*, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 29. For a parallel argument, see ʿAlāʾ al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, ed. Yaḥyā Murād (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 2004), 220–221. See also Engin Erdem, "Ölüm Sonrası Hayat," *Din*

This difficulty cannot be removed simply by appealing to divine power. God's omnipotence can explain the creation of a body exactly similar to the previous body, but it cannot make qualitative similarity amount to numerical identity, nor can it turn two distinct beginnings of existence into one. The issue is not whether God can create a body after death, but whether such a body is the very same body that previously existed. If the later body has a new beginning of existence, it is a new body; if it has the old beginning, then the original body did not truly cease to exist. The proponent of the re-creation model is therefore faced with two options: either the later object is not identical with the former one, in which case there is only the creation of a numerically distinct body, or it is identical with the former one, in which case the same object would have two distinct beginnings of existence. The proponent of the re-creation model is therefore faced with two options: either the later body is not identical with the former one, in which case what occurs is merely the creation of a numerically distinct body, or numerical identity is preserved only because the original body never wholly ceased to exist, in which case the account no longer describes re-creation after annihilation.

The re-creation model, then, also fails to secure post-mortem survival on materialist grounds. The difficulty is not a limitation on divine power, but a problem of identity: if the self is identified with the body, and if the body is destroyed at death, the later divine creation of a similar body does not amount to the survival of the same person.

1.2. The Dualist Solution: Survival without Bodily Continuity

The preceding discussion has shown that theistic materialist accounts face a common difficulty: they attempt to secure post-mortem survival by reassembling or re-creating something bodily. Yet neither model succeeds in explaining how the very same person can survive bodily death. In both cases, the problem is not primarily a limitation on divine power, but a problem of numerical identity. If the self is identical with the body, or with some bodily constituent, then the destruction of the body threatens to be the destruction of the person. A theory

Felsefesi, ed. Recep Kılıç (Ankara: Anküsem Yayınları, 2013), 453–454; Râzi, *el-Muhassal*, 209–210.

of the afterlife therefore requires a different basis for personal identity, one that is not interrupted by the dissolution of the body.

This is precisely what the dualist account offers. On this view, the human person is not identical with the body, nor with any bodily part, but with an immaterial soul. Bodily death is therefore not the annihilation of the person, but only the dissolution of the bodily organism with which the soul had been associated. The persistence of the person after death depends on the continued existence of the immaterial soul. In this sense, the dualist solution may be described as a theory of survival without bodily continuity. More strongly, one may say that, strictly speaking, death is not the destruction of the person: what dies is the body, not the self.

In contemporary terminology, this view may be called the doctrine of immortality. Immortality, in the relevant sense, means that the self continues to exist without undergoing annihilation at the moment of bodily death. It can therefore include both bodiless immortality and re-embodied immortality. What is common to both versions is that the person's existence is not interrupted by bodily death. In this respect, Avicenna's account of bodiless immortality and al-Ghazālī's account of re-embodied afterlife belong to the same general dualist framework.[7]

The crucial question, then, is whether the soul can exist independently of the body and remain unaffected by the body's corruption.

[7] Although I treat al-Ghazālī as belonging to the dualist camp, this is not meant to deny the complexity and ambiguity of his doctrine of the soul. On this issue, see Timothy J. Gianotti, *Al-Ghazālī's Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology and Eschatology of the Iḥyā'* (Leiden: Brill, 2001); Ayman Shihadeh, "Al-Ghazālī and Kalām: The Conundrum of His Body-Soul Dualism", *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of al-Ghazālī. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank Griffel (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2016), 113–141; and Aykut Alper Yılmaz, "Gazzâlî'de Ruhun Tabiatı Tartışması: Maddi mi Gayri Maddi mi?," *Atatürk Üniversitesi İlahiyat Tetkikleri Dergisi* 55 (2021), 301–325. For a dualist reading, see Mehmet Sait Reçber, "Al-Ghazālī, Platonism and the Metaphysics of the Self," *AJAMES* 19/2 (2004), 73–86. For a more skeptical reading, according to which al-Ghazālī's appeal to an immaterial soul in the *Tahāfut* functions primarily as a dialectical strategy against the philosophers' denial of bodily resurrection, see Michael E. Marmura, "Al-Ghazālī on Bodily Resurrection and Causality in the *Tahāfut* and the *Iqtiṣād*," in *Probing in Islamic Philosophy: Studies in the Philosophies of Ibn Sina, al-Ghazali and Other Major Muslim Thinkers* (Binghamton, NY: Global Academic Publishing, 2005), 273–299.

Avicenna's answer is affirmative: the soul's survival is not dependent on the body's survival.[8] The central point is this: if the soul and the body are two distinct substances, then their relation cannot be one of essential mutual dependence. For if the soul were essentially related to the body, neither could be a substance in its own right; rather, together they would constitute a single substance, as matter and form constitute one primary substance. But on the dualist view at issue here, the soul is an immaterial substance and the body is a material substance. Their relation must therefore be accidental rather than essential. This accidental character of the soul-body relation is decisive for the possibility of post-mortem survival: the destruction of one relatum does not by itself entail the destruction of the other. If the soul's relation to the body is accidental, the corruption of the body removes the soul's relation to that body, but it does not remove the soul itself. Bodily death is therefore the termination of a bodily association, not the annihilation of the subject who had been associated with the body.

The conclusion to be drawn from the preceding discussion is that dualism has a clear philosophical advantage over theistic materialism. Still, two secondary objections should be considered before turning to the nature of post-mortem life. First, even if the immaterial soul is not destroyed by the dissolution of the body, could it not perish through some internal cause, or could it not simply be annihilated by God?[9] For the purposes of the present argument, however, what matters is the more limited point that bodily death does not by itself entail the destruction of the soul; once this is granted, post-mortem survival

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[8] Avicenna develops this argument most explicitly in *Kitāb al-Shifāʾ/al-Ṭabīʿiyyāt: al-Nafs*, ed. Fazlur Rahman as *Avicenna's De Anima (Arabic Text): Being the Psychological Part of Kitāb al-Shifāʾ* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 227–231. Avicenna also develops arguments for the immateriality of the human soul. For a version of the unity of consciousness argument, see Avicenna, *Avicenna's De Anima*, 252–254; for a version of the simplicity of consciousness argument, see ibid., 209–214. For a concise discussion of Avicenna's arguments for the immateriality of the human soul, see Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 120–124. Within the limits of the present article, I shall not undertake a full assessment of Avicenna's arguments for the soul's immortality or immateriality.

[9] Peter Carruthers raises the general worry that if there is no principled difficulty in coming into existence from non-existence, then there should be no a priori obstacle to passing out of existence. See Peter Carruthers, *Introducing Persons: Theories and Arguments in the Philosophy of Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 45.

becomes possible without bodily continuity. Avicenna, to be sure, offers a further argument for the soul's natural incorruptibility, but the present argument does not depend on the full success of that stronger claim.[10] Second, one might object, from within a theistic framework, that materialist resurrection theories preserve a more direct role for divine power, whereas the doctrine of immortality seems to make post-mortem survival independent of God. This objection is not compelling either. A theistic dualist need not regard souls as eternal in a self-sufficient or fully Platonic sense; created souls may remain dependent on God, who could annihilate them if He so willed.[11] The crucial difference is that materialist theories invoke divine power precisely when serious logical difficulties arise, such as whether a numerically identical entity can be re-created after annihilation, or whether multiple simultaneous candidates for personal identity could emerge. Dualist theories, by contrast, insofar as they appeal to divine power, do so in a coherent manner: God can create and sustain an immaterial soul and refrain from annihilating it. Thus, the dualist doctrine of immortality need not exclude divine agency; rather, it can situate divine agency within a framework that does not require the violation of numerical identity.

2. The Nature Question: al-Ghazālī against Avicenna

Having shown that dualism provides a more coherent account of the possibility of the afterlife than theistic materialism, the argument now turns to the nature of post-mortem life. This transition is crucial, for it is only at this second level that the real disagreement between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī emerges. Avicenna defends bodiless immortality and argues that the soul, once separated from the body, cannot be re-embodied. Al-Ghazālī, by contrast, denies that re-embodiment is impossible and argues that Avicenna's bodiless afterlife threatens to make the scriptural promises of reward and punishment unintelligible or impossible. The aim of this section is to assess these two opposed

[10] Avicenna, *Avicenna's De Anima*, 231–233.

[11] For a theistic distinction between God's eternity and the derivative everlastingness of created souls, see Fahreddin Râzi, *Kitâbu'n-Nefs ve'r-Rûh ve Şerhu Kuvâhumâ*, trans. Hüsnü Aydeniz (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2009), 30.

lines of argument and to determine whether either position can establish a decisive philosophical superiority over the other.

2.1. Avicenna's Bodiless Immortality: The Impossibility of Re-embodiment

Once the debate is relocated within the dualist framework, Avicenna's position can be stated more precisely. His claim is not merely that the soul survives bodily death, but that it survives without being rejoined to another body. In other words, Avicenna's account of post-mortem existence is a form of bodiless immortality. He rejects the possibility that the soul, after its separation from the body, could become embodied again.

Avicenna's argument against re-embodiment rests on his account of the soul's emergence in relation to a suitably disposed body. On this account, when a human body reaches the appropriate level of organization and preparedness, it receives a soul from the separate causes. A properly constituted human body is therefore not a neutral instrument that may or may not be associated with a soul; rather, by virtue of its preparedness, it receives a soul of its own. If this is so, then re-embodiment seems to generate an immediate difficulty. For if a separated soul were later attached to another body, that body would already have received its own soul. The result would be that one and the same body would be associated with two souls.

The argument can be reconstructed as follows:

1. Every suitably organized human body receives a soul of its own.

2. If a separated soul were re-embodied in another body, that body would already possess its own soul.

3. It would therefore be animated by two distinct souls.

4. But one human body cannot be animated by two distinct human souls at the same time.

Therefore, a separated soul cannot be re-embodied in another body.[12]

[12] For Avicenna's own formulation of this argument see Avicenna, *Kitāb al-Najāt*, ed.

The argument is initially plausible because it captures an important feature of embodied human life. We do not ordinarily find one body governed by several distinct human souls, nor do we experience ourselves as sharing the governance of a single body with another soul. For Avicenna, if a body is truly alive as a human body, it is governed by one soul, and that soul is conscious of its relation to that body. If another soul were present but neither governed the body nor was conscious of it, then it would not genuinely be related to that body at all. Thus, the possibility of re-embodiment seems to threaten the one-body–one-soul structure of embodied human life.

Nevertheless, the crucial premise of the argument is the first one. Avicenna assumes that whenever a body becomes appropriately disposed to receive a soul, it necessarily receives a soul of its own. This assumption is not a neutral metaphysical principle. It depends on Avicenna's broader emanationist framework, according to which a suitably prepared body receives a soul from the separate causes. Within that framework, the conclusion follows naturally: if every properly disposed body necessarily receives its own soul, then the later attachment of a previously separated soul would generate the unacceptable result of two souls in one body.

Yet someone who does not accept this emanationist principle need not accept the conclusion. If there is no compelling reason to accept Avicenna's assumption that every suitably organized body must independently receive a newly individuated soul, then we are returned to the more basic dualist framework outlined above. On that framework, the soul and the body are not two aspects of a single material organism, but two distinct substances, each capable of subsisting in its own right. If so, their relation cannot be so essential as to make any further embodiment impossible. Rather, the soul's relation to a body must be understood as accidental or contingent: the soul may be joined to a body without being numerically dependent on that particular body for its continued existence. A defender of eschatological re-embodiment may therefore deny that every suitably organized body

Majid Fakhry (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1985), 227.

must receive a new soul of its own. One may instead argue that the eschatological body is not a naturally generated body that demands a newly emanated soul, but a body prepared by God for an already existing soul. On this alternative view, re-embodiment would not entail that two souls belong to one body; rather, the body would be constituted precisely as the vehicle of the pre-existing soul. For this reason, Avicenna's argument, though powerful within his own metaphysical framework, is not decisive against re-embodiment as such.

2.2. al-Ghazālī's Re-embodiment: The Impossibility of Bodiless Reward and Punishment

If Avicenna's argument against re-embodiment is not decisive, then the possibility of a re-embodied afterlife remains open within the dualist framework. This is precisely the point at which al-Ghazālī's alternative becomes relevant. Al-Ghazālī does not need to deny the immortality of the soul in order to defend bodily afterlife; on the contrary, his position presupposes that the soul survives bodily death. His disagreement with Avicenna concerns what may happen to the surviving soul after its separation from the body. If the soul and the body are distinct substances, and if the soul's relation to the body is accidental rather than essential, then the fact that one soul-body relation comes to an end does not by itself preclude the soul's later relation to another body. Al-Ghazālī's position may therefore be summarized as follows: the human person is ultimately identical with the soul, the soul survives bodily death, and the same surviving soul can be joined to a body in the afterlife.[13]

Having established this point, the discussion can now shift from the possibility of al-Ghazālī's re-embodied afterlife to the adequacy of Avicenna's own alternative, namely bodiless immortality. The issue at stake is not whether bodiless immortality is compatible with dualist metaphysics as such, since a dualist account can make post-mortem survival possible without bodily continuity. The question is rather whether Avicenna's exclusion of bodily afterlife undermines the very possibility of eschatological reward and punishment as affirmed in

[13] See Gazzâlî, *Filozofların Tutarsızlığı*, trans. Mahmut Kaya and Hüseyin Sarıoğlu (Istanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2012), 214, 218.

scripture. From a Ghazālian perspective, the strongest objection is not merely that Avicenna departs from the apparent meaning and concrete depictions of religious texts, but that a bodiless soul may lack the experiential conditions without which reward and punishment would not be possible at all.[14] Even if such a soul can think, know, or remain self-aware, scriptural reward and punishment seem to involve pleasure and pain, perception, affective response, and other forms of experience ordinarily mediated through embodiment. The objection, then, is that bodiless immortality may fail not merely to account for scriptural depictions of the afterlife, but to secure the very possibility of the reward and punishment that scripture promises.

The objection may be developed as follows. We may develop the objection as follows. A bodiless soul may perhaps continue to think, know, or be self-aware; but this does not yet show that it can undergo the full range of experiences required for eschatological reward and punishment. Human reward and punishment, at least as described in scripture, seem to involve more than bare intellectual awareness. They involve pleasure and pain, perception, affective response, spatial orientation, and forms of experience that are ordinarily mediated through embodiment. A bodiless soul, however, appears to lack the very conditions under which such experiences occur: it has no familiar spatio-temporal location, no sense-organs, no bodily activities, and no capacity for bodily pleasure or pain. If this is so, then a purely bodiless afterlife would leave the soul functionally deficient. It would reduce post-mortem existence to bare intellection or self-awareness and would thereby make the promised realities of reward and punishment impossible.

The objection can be formulated as follows:

[14] At the end of the *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa*, al-Ghazālī counts the denial of bodily resurrection among the three doctrines that amount to unbelief. See Gazzâlî, *Filozofların Tutarsızlığı*, 225. On the discussion of bodily resurrection in the *Tahāfut*, see also Ömer Faruk Erdoğan, *Tehâfüt'te Tekfir Tartışmaları: Gazzâlî'nin İbn Sînâ Yorumu* (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi Yayınları, 2020), 245–308. This article does not address the theological implications of this charge, but only the underlying philosophical issue: whether Avicennian bodiless immortality makes scriptural reward and punishment impossible.

1. Eschatological reward and punishment require genuine experiential states such as pleasure, pain, happiness, misery, perception, and affective response.

2. Such experiential states are possible only for an embodied subject, or at least for a subject whose experience is bodily mediated.

3. A bodiless soul is neither embodied nor bodily mediated.

Therefore, a bodiless soul cannot undergo the experiential states required for eschatological reward and punishment.

Therefore, eschatological reward and punishment are impossible for a bodiless soul.

The vulnerable premise in this objection is the second one: that the experiential states required for eschatological reward and punishment can occur only in an embodied subject, or at least only through bodily mediation. But is this a commitment that follows from dualism itself? A dualist may grant that reward and punishment require genuine experience, and may also grant that a separated soul is not embodied in the ordinary sense, without conceding that pleasure, pain, happiness, misery, perception, or affective response are possible only for an embodied subject. That further claim presupposes a strong dependence of consciousness and affect on bodily mediation; yet precisely this dependence is what a dualist is entitled to deny. If the soul is an immaterial subject of consciousness, then it remains at least possible that it can undergo non-bodily, or quasi-sensory, experiences apart from union with a physical body.

A useful way to see why this premise should not be taken as self-evident is provided by H. H. Price's account of bodiless survival. Price does not attempt to prove the reality of post-mortem existence; his more modest aim is to show that the idea of a bodiless subject undergoing experiences is not incoherent. His central analogy is dream experience. In dreams, ordinary sensory contact with the external world is suspended, yet we still undergo vivid quasi-sensory experiences. Images can replace sense-data; they can stand in spatial relations to one another; they can elicit emotional responses; and the dreaming subject can even imagine itself as occupying a body-like position

within an imaginal environment. Moreover, Price argues that such an imaginal world need not be wholly private: if bodiless subjects could interact telepathically, their imaginal experiences might form a shared world.[15] The significance of this argument is not that post-mortem life must be dream-like, but that sensory-like, affective, and spatially structured experiences do not obviously require ordinary bodily mediation. Thus, a bodiless subject may lack ordinary bodily sensation, but it does not follow that it cannot undergo experiences relevant to reward and punishment.

A similar line of response can be found in Avicenna himself. Avicenna does not deny that scriptural descriptions of reward and punishment involve what may be called "corporeal" pleasure and pain; rather, he denies that such experiences must require the soul's re-embodiment. He grants that, in our present embodied life, the operation of imagination normally depends on the brain. Yet he maintains that there is no logical impossibility in a separated soul's undergoing imaginative experiences without an earthly body. In the afterlife, the soul may experience the pleasures and pains described by scripture through its imaginative faculty, and these experiences may even be stronger than ordinary sensory experiences. Avicenna's point, then, is not that reward and punishment are merely metaphorical or that the soul is reduced to bare intellection after death. Rather, the relevant experiences can occur in the soul without the ordinary mediation of bodily organs.[16] Thus, even if one grants that eschatological reward and punishment require genuine experiential states, it does not follow that they require re-embodiment. What the objection needs to establish is precisely what Avicenna denies: that no genuine experience of reward or punishment is possible unless the soul is reunited with a body.

None of this shows that Avicenna's account of bodiless immortality is more plausible than al-Ghazālī's account of re-embodiment. The

[15] For Price's argument, see H. H. Price, "Personal Survival and the Idea of Another World," in *Classical and Contemporary Readings in the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. John Hick (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 377–379.

[16] Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of The Healing*, 347.

aim is more limited: the experiential objection to bodiless immortality does not decisively establish that eschatological reward and punishment require embodiment or bodily mediation. Price's account of quasi-sensory experience and Avicenna's own appeal to imaginative experience both suggest that it is not incoherent to suppose that a bodiless subject can undergo pleasure, pain, happiness, misery, and other experiential states. If this is right, then the crucial premise underlying the claim that genuine reward and punishment require embodiment or bodily mediation remains unproven. Al-Ghazālī's re-embodiment account may still appear more naturally compatible with the literal and ordinary sense of scriptural descriptions of the afterlife. Nevertheless, once the dualist framework is granted, both options remain possible: the soul may survive without a body, or it may survive and later be joined to a body. The dispute between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī therefore remains an intra-dualist disagreement about the mode of post-mortem existence, not a decisive refutation of one view by the other.

Conclusion

I have tried to suggest that the familiar opposition between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī concerning the afterlife becomes misleading when it is treated as the most fundamental divide in Islamic eschatological thought. The more basic distinction, I have argued, is not between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī, but between materialist and dualist accounts of the self. Theistic materialist accounts attempt to secure post-mortem survival by reassembling or re-creating a bodily entity. Yet both strategies face serious difficulties concerning numerical identity.

Dualism provides a more coherent account of the possibility of the afterlife because it does not make the survival of the person depend on bodily continuity. If the self is identical with an immaterial soul, then bodily death does not by itself entail the annihilation of the person. In this respect, Avicenna and al-Ghazālī stand on the same side of the more fundamental debate: both can explain post-mortem survival by appeal to the continued existence of the soul. Their real disagreement

begins only at the next level, namely with the nature or mode of post-mortem existence. Avicenna defends bodiless immortality, whereas al-Ghazālī defends re-embodiment. This disagreement is important, but it is an intra-dualist disagreement rather than a fundamental opposition between two rival metaphysical frameworks.

The second part of the argument has tried to show that neither side decisively defeats the other. Avicenna's argument against re-embodiment depends on a contested assumption: that every suitably prepared body necessarily receives a soul of its own. If this assumption is granted, his case against re-embodiment has considerable force. Yet it is not a metaphysically neutral premise, and a defender of eschatological re-embodiment can reasonably reject it. Conversely, the strongest objection that may be developed from a Ghazālian perspective against bodiless immortality also depends on a controversial premise: that genuine experiences of pleasure, pain, happiness, misery, perception, and affective response require embodiment or bodily mediation. A bodiless soul may lack ordinary bodily sensation, but it does not follow that it lacks every form of experiential capacity relevant to reward and punishment.

This conclusion should not be taken to show that Avicenna's account is more plausible than al-Ghazālī's. Al-Ghazālī's re-embodiment view may still appear more naturally compatible with the ordinary and literal sense of scriptural descriptions of the afterlife. The more modest conclusion is that, once the dualist framework is granted and the human person is ultimately identified with the immaterial soul, both options remain philosophically open: the soul may survive without a body, or it may survive and later be joined to a body. The dispute between bodiless immortality and re-embodiment therefore becomes a second-order debate within a shared dualist framework. The divide between Avicenna and al-Ghazālī should accordingly be redrawn. They are not fundamental opponents concerning the possibility of the afterlife; they are dualist allies on the question of possibility and intra-dualist rivals on the question of nature. This does not dissolve their disagreement, but it does show that it is less radical, and

philosophically more nuanced, than the standard picture often suggests.

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